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TEACHING AS A CHRISTIAN CALLING*

What Is a Christian Calling?

It has become a commonplace to say that there is no secular or sacred in the realm of vocations. Christ's call may be to the plow or the counter or the desk or the mine as truly as to the pulpit. The factors which constitute a "call" have been formulated from the rich experience of men who have known the pressure of God's hand upon them thrusting them forth into service for humanity. Decide in your best moments; decide with reference to your own talents and weaknesses, remembering on the one hand that God gave the talents and will be expecting you to use them and on the other hand that in the economy of God it sometimes happens "that when I am weak then am I strong"; decide in the face of the world's need; decide in harmony with the will of God made manifest in the manifold ways by which He reveals Himself to men: through Bible, through friend, through intelligence, through heart, through conscience, through the Jesus of history, through the Inner Christ. If you take such factors into account any calling will be Christian.

It is wholesome to believe that any honest calling may be a Christian calling for the man with the spirit of Christ in his heart. It ought to be true. Is it? In his book entitled "The Religious Education of an American Citizen" Francis Greenwood Peabody tells of a letter received by a college teacher in which "an ingenuous youth propounded the following question: How many Christians in your University go into athletics? What did he have in mind in this inquiry? Did he wish to know how many young men played their games honorably and generously, so that Jesus looking upon them as He once looked upon a young man, would love them? On the contrary, the context of the letter indicated that what the writer had in mind was not an inquiry into the character of student-life, but a technical and ecclesiastical question, concerned with a religion of experience set apart from ordinary affairs. It was as if he had inquired how many Baptists owned automobiles; or how many Democrats went to the ball game. The Christian life seemed to him to occupy one area of life, and the athletic life another; so that one might come out of the first and 'go into' the

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second. It was as though one were traveling on a vestibuled train, where one stepped over an intervening space and passed from the Christian life to the athletic life, as one might sleep in one car and eat in another."

The Christian youth of today will not ask, May a Christian "go into" the ministry, law, medicine, engineering, education? but Do these vocations afford an opportunity for the adequate expression of the Christian purpose? Not, Is it compatible with the successful pursuit of a certain profession to devote one's leisure to religious activity? But, Is the absorbing and all inclusive business of that vocation fundamentally Christlike? Does it offer scope for the expression of the brotherhood in my heart in the daily grind of its duties as well as in the lofty idealism of its goals? Every vocation gives a man a chance to pick up the wounded and robbed who have fallen by the wayside, but what about the main business which takes him from Jerusalem to Jericho? Is that main business Christian? We have preached for generations that the Christian religion is a way of living with such success that the best type of youth will not profess himself to be a Christian unless he can be shown that it is actually possible to find scope for the expression of Christ's spirit and program in the very warp and woof of the practical business of living.

Hence we are compelled to ask, still, What are the "Christian callings"?

Teaching as a Christian Calling.

Is teaching such a calling? By this approach to the subject we are prevented from discussing the incidental features of this vocation such as the delightful camaraderie of the teaching fellowship, the compensations which plain living and high thinking bring in their train, the fact that a reasonably successful teacher is "sure of a job," and that in after years grateful students assure him that he has been the dominant influence in their lives. We are shut up to the question: Is the main business of the teacher "in harmony with the ethical convictions which we identify with Christ"? There are a number of reasons for answering that query with an emphatic affirmative.

A. *Education is a "Christianized section" of the social order.* Prof. Rauschenbusch is authority for this statement.

By it he means not that education is free from serious evils in root and branch but that it is so organized in this country as to make for rather than against the kingdom of God. Consider the characteristics of our educational system as a whole.

It is democratic rather than exclusive in its scope. "Except in private schools patronized by the wealthy, manifestations of social exclusiveness call for apology and every advance in democracy is proclaimed with pride. The Christian missionary impulse has taken possession of the teaching profession and the great organization of education. Institutions eagerly create extension courses and implore the intellectually lost to come in and be saved."

It is democratic rather than autocratic in spirit. I remember with vivid distinctness the surprising experience which was mine as a boy when we moved from one section of the country where it was fashionable not to like to go to school to a section where going to school was "being done" with considerable alacrity and even satisfaction by the leading spirits in the gang. It is one of the merits of modern education, from top to bottom, that it has very largely eliminated "the whining schoolboy, with his satchel and shining morning face, creeping like a snail unwillingly to school." The reign of terror is over in education. Authority there must and always will be, but it is the authority which belongs naturally to special knowledge and the authority which resides in strong personality, not that which has its sanction in birch rods. The teacher must seek to approximate the power of Jesus, who spoke not *by* authority but as one *having* authority.

Not profit but service is its motive. In the main those educational enterprises which exist solely for profit are outside the pale. Let a graduate school once get the reputation of granting degrees for the fee and the degree will cost more than it is worth no matter how cheap the price. The teacher, with the minister, is by common consent acknowledged to be a servant of the community whose reward must be reckoned in some other terms than dollars and cents since the prizes, on that basis, are inconsiderable as compared with other callings. He is among us as one who serves.

From the standpoint of economics education is perhaps

more Christian than any section of our life. In spite of meagre salaries, inadequate equipment, crowded conditions, and educational politics the basis is a sound and Christian one. As Prof. Rauschenbusch has reminded us, "Louis Blanc's maxim, From every one according to his ability and to every one according to his need, is so lofty and unselfish that even socialists think that it would not work in a society just emerging from capitalism. Yet that is the principle upon which our schools are maintained. Every family is taxed for their support according to its financial ability and it gets the benefits of the school according to its needs." Even the schools and colleges which are not tax supported approximate that principle, for no student pays anything like the cost of his education and many a Christian school and college can boast that no youth was ever turned away from its doors, provided he had health and the will to work, simply because of his poverty.

B. *The Goals and the methods of the teacher are in fundamental harmony with Christ's spirit and program.*

In a certain preparatory school the members of the incoming class are asked to write out why they have come to that school. The answers are usually what one would expect. I have come to this school to get an education, or I have come because my parents sent me. But one year a boy wrote, with a certain grim humor which no doubt disclosed the tragedy of a home: *I have come to this school to learn how to get along with other people.* If we add *and to get other people along*, we have a pretty complete statement of the goal of education. Social adjustment and efficiency and social progress, these are the aims of the modern teacher.

Where else in all the realm of human activity can be found an expressed goal so fundamentally in harmony with the program of Jesus? Jesus lavished himself upon individuals, finding even the least to be worthy of his best. To him a man was worth more than a sheep. Personality was supreme in his eyes. Yet he saw that personality only develops in a society of persons organized according to the will of God and from beginning to end he proclaimed this society or kingdom of God. If Christian young men and women do not accept this challenge, the challenge of educational idealism to Christianity, and pour into this

enterprise the Christian spirit and program, we will miss the supreme missionary opportunity of our day.

In the matter of method, too, the movement is clearly in the direction of the Christian way. It would be presumptuous to say in anything like detail what educational methods are. Their name is Legion. But in them all the teacher is a vital and self respecting part in the process. We have long ago scrapped the theory that the teacher is expected to be tyrant and kill-joy. "Go out and see what Willie is doing and tell him to stop it," said a mother to the nurse. Education no longer has as its major premise the conviction that whatever Willie is doing is sure to be wrong.

We are also emerging from the stage in which whatever Willie is doing is assumed to be right or at least irremediable because we think we can give it a psychological explanation. It was the swing of the pendulum, from the older standards and methods. Willie's conduct might at times appear to be naughty, but really it was only natural, the result of certain psychological laws playing in or upon his little self. Let him unfold and develop according to the innate laws of his own nature. Education was definable as the unfolding of the powers of the child. It was inevitable that the teacher should be relegated by such a theory to the position of a more or less interested spectator in the process. But we have learned that Willie may unfold into any one of several different kinds of selves; that education has the very definite task of seeing that he develops into the self that will serve society and thus lead to his own happiness; and that the teacher has the high privilege of introducing him to this society as it has had its beginnings in the past, to share with him the fellowship of such a society in the present, and to point out the alluring possibilities of the consummation of this society in the future.

It ought not to be necessary to point out how closely Jesus' educational method has been followed in the modern theory. He won men to himself before they understood his ideas. Their hearts understood him before their heads. He bound them into a powerful fellowship about himself which was really the dominant influence in their lives. He outlined the principles of the social order, the kingdom of God which he came to establish,

but he also set it up in their midst in the little group life which began in Galilee. He fired them with a passionate enthusiasm for the coming of this order of life, begun in their own fellowship, into the entire life of humanity.

C. The Teacher has an opportunity to do what tremendously needs doing for the religious life of youth.

The most prevalent spiritual diseases among young people to-day are malnutrition, paralysis and disillusionment. The teacher who is in touch with student life is in a position to deal directly and indirectly with these diseases. Let us look at them in turn.

Religious malnutrition. The little children of Europe were weakened to the point of starvation and developed terrible diseases, like the rickets, which twisted their little bones into hideous shapes, not because they did not receive enough to eat, in quantity, but because what they ate did not nourish them. An extra meal per day of simple but nourishing food wrought marvelous results in those small bodies. I have seen the amazing effect that it has upon a student to discover that it is legitimate to use one's mind in the field of religious thinking, and that, as a matter of fact, some of the most brilliant minds that humanity has produced have worked in this field. Many a youth of today is a religious illiterate and supposing everybody to be as ignorant and provincial as himself he relegates religion to the limbo of outworn superstition. A teacher whose intelligence commands respect has an almost unlimited field of activity which he may enter without trespassing upon sectarian preserves.

Religious paralysis. Not only is the religious life of youth seriously undernourished, but very often the chill of paralysis creeps over the most religious natures somewhere along the educational pathway. It is a familiar story. The student finds himself, usually during college days, but sometimes before, in a religious atmosphere different from that of home or church. All the great verities are open to question. Teachers speak of certain religious ideas in quite a tentative fashion, not necessarily because they do not believe them but because they are trying to face these religious problems in the same way that they would approach any other field of investigation. Older students pride themselves that they have discarded certain "superstitions." These same "superstitions" have never been separated by the

youth's Sunday School teachers from the really central pillars of the structure of faith, and when he sees a bit of the scaffolding go he assumes that the whole edifice must shortly crumble. No one, in the nature of the case, can possibly play the part of physician to such a youth so effectively as can the Christian teacher who has walked that pathway before and knows the possibilities of danger and of disaster which lie therein.

Disillusionment. Perhaps the supreme tragedy of all youth is the discovery that dreams do not come true, that the pure and splendid idealism of adolescence has not been keyed to the actual facts of our common life. Future usefulness and success lie very largely in the right personal adjustment to the inevitable tragedy of disillusionment. If these disillusionments make youth cynical and sophisticated, if they pull it down to the level of "things as they are" then they mark indeed the tragedy of youth. If on the other hand disillusionment results in vision, if the discovery of what men and things really are, brutal though that discovery may be, opens youth's eyes to see what it may do to help, then the way is wide open to serviceable and useful living. Ideas, however brilliant, will not remedy this disease. Only strong, clean men and women whose lives of service give the lie to the cynicism and sophistication of worldliness can help here. The teacher who is the incarnation of such a faith projects his life "Far down the future's broadening way" and unconsciously helps many a youth to vanquish the foes of his finest self.

D. *Teaching and the Priesthood of Personality.*

The fourteenth chapter of Genesis tells a strange story of a certain Melchizedek who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him and received tithes from him. That is all we are told about this Melchizedek, nothing about his father or his mother or when he was born or when he died. He comes up out of the mists of obscurity for a few moments then sinks back into obscurity once more. But this strange figure laid hold powerfully upon the imagination of later writers, particularly the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. He found in him a striking figure, a priest of God, not because anybody had appointed him to be priest, nor because his father was a priest, but because he stood on the Godward side of the patriarch Abraham reminding him of those higher

obligations which were his even in the flush of victory. And the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews gave currency to a great phrase, first coined by the Psalmist, which has come ringing down through the Christian centuries, "a priest . . . after the order of Melchizedek," by which he meant, if I understand him, the priesthood of personality.

It is given to the teacher to stand on the higher side, the Godward side of the lives of others. He may be a priest after the order of Melchizedek, moving youth to higher levels not because of official appointment or ecclesiastical ordination but by the fact of what he is and that he is in daily contact with life at its most malleable period. And that priesthood, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrew tells us, was Christ's priesthood.

We all remember the famous statement of what the Doctor meant to the boys of Rugby in "Tom Brown's School Days"; "We couldn't enter into half that we heard; we hadn't the knowledge of our own hearts or the knowledge of one another; and little enough of the faith, hope, and love needed to that end. But we listened as all boys in their better moods will listen (aye, and men, too, for the matter of that), to a man who we felt to be, with all his heart and soul and strength, striving against whatever was mean and unmanly and unrighteous in our little world. It was not the cold, clear voice of one giving advice and warning from serene heights to those who were struggling and sinning below, but the warm living voice of one who was fighting for us and by our sides, and calling on us to help him and ourselves and one another. And so, wearily and little by little, but surely and steadily on the whole, was brought home to the young boy, for the first time, the meaning of his life: that it was no fool's or sluggard's paradise into which he had wandered by chance, but a battle-field ordained from of old, where there are no spectators, but the youngest must take his side and the stakes are life and death."

ALEX. C. PURDY.

THE CALL TO TEACH *

The business which occupies a man's time and yields him an income, is spoken of sometimes as his living, sometimes as his calling. Each of those words expresses an important truth.

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